EFF UNIVERSITY TAKE-WITH-YOU TOOLKIT

Financial Aid Offer Decoder

Understand what is free, what is earned, what is borrowed, and what is still unpaid.

USE THIS TOOLKIT TO
compare college offers by net cost and risk instead of being misled by a large 'total aid' number.

1. Write down the full annual cost

Use the school's current estimate and confirm which expenses are billed directly.

Tuition and fees	
Housing and meals	
Books and supplies	
Travel and personal costs	
Health insurance	
TOTAL COST	

2. Separate every kind of aid

Do not add all aid together as though it works the same way.

- [ ] Grants and scholarships: usually do not require repayment; confirm renewal rules.
- [ ] Work-study: wages earned after working; not normally an upfront bill credit.
- [ ] Loans: borrowed money that must be repaid, often with interest and fees.
- [ ] Parent or private loans: borrowing with separate approval, terms, and risk.

Total grants/scholarships	
Total loans offered	
Estimated unpaid gap	

3. Ask the financial-aid office

Use specific, written questions and save the response.

- [ ] Is every grant or scholarship renewable? What must I do to keep it?
- [ ] Has my family's current financial situation been considered?
- [ ] Is there an appeal, professional-judgment review, completion grant, payment plan, or deadline extension?

[ ]	What changes if I live off campus, reduce credits, withdraw, or change majors?
[ ]	Are there deposits or required costs not shown here?

4. Compare offers side by side

The strongest offer is the one that is affordable, sustainable, and supported across multiple years.

School A net cost	
School B net cost	
School C net cost	
Questions still unanswered	

PAUSE BEFORE ACCEPTING DEBT. Confirm the net price, renewal conditions, remaining gap, and realistic monthly impact. For help, visit portal.estherfundsfoundation.org.